

The Consultation: Sowing the Seeds of Discord

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October 1835 proved to be a momentous month for Texas. All summer rumors of an impending military campaign to subdue the rebellious colonists had raced from community to community. Even Stephen F. Austin's return from prison in Mexico City failed to calm the situation. Events were happening faster than plans could be made or followed. The firing on Mexican troops at Gonzales on October 2 resoundingly announced the outbreak of hostilities. Some colonists had hoped war could be avoided. Others hoped they would be better prepared when it arrived. As democrats of the Jacksonian mindset, community leaders called for a meeting where a unified stand against the Mexico's Centralists could be discussed and adopted.¹ The meeting, which was designated the Consultation, had a significant effect on the course of and the outcome of the revolution.²

The meeting, originally set for October 15 in San Felipe, had to be postponed for two



San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site
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weeks. The reason was simple—many of the delegates who had been elected to represent their communities were serving with General Austin in the Federal Army of Texas. As volunteers with the Texan force preparing to attack San Antonio de Béxar, many of the delegates were reluctant to abandon the coming

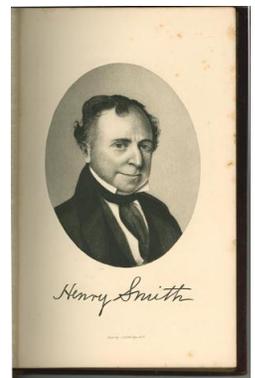
¹ Many of the Americans who immigrated to Texas had participated in Jacksonian politics, which often involved public meeting where citizens expressed their views and plans were made to address problems.

² Paul D. Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience: A Political and Social History, 1835-1836*. (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1992), Chapter 3: *The Consultation, October-November, 1835*, 38-52. While Chapter 3 examines the Consultation, Lack's entire volume is highly recommended readers wanting to learn about the political factions and the leaders (both well and little known) who helped shaped the course of the Texas Revolution.

fight and their comrades were loath to let them go. This had an effect on the Consultation when it finally met because several prominent individuals, such as Austin, were unable to attend and contribute to the deliberations. The absence of Austin and his allies with him in the army strengthened the role the War Party played in the Consultation.

November 1, 1835, became the new date for the meeting but a quorum could not be formed until the 4th. Several communities failed to send delegates or their representatives failed to appear. Those in attendance elected Dr. Branch T. Archer president of the meeting. The delegates were faced with important issues that would affect both Texas' immediate and long range future. The delegates announced that their goal was to restore Mexico's Federal Constitution and, until that was accomplished, Texas was not part of the current Centralist arrangement. To curb the public outrage against land speculation, the land office was ordered closed. Plans for both civil government and a military force were laid out. By the end of November, the Consultation adjourned with the delegates and their constituents believing Texas' future clearly outlined.³

While the Consultation may have provided a framework for Texas' future, its members had unknowingly sown the seeds of discord and chaos. The delegates passed over Austin, the natural choice for provisional governor, and instead selected Henry Smith. An ardent support of the War Party, Smith could not contain his hatred and distrust of all Mexicans thereby dooming any collaboration between Texan and Mexican Federalists. By January 1836,



Smith's inflexibility and personal attacks on his rivals in his administration had split Texas' civil

³ A recommended online source for information on the Consultation is the Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas website. See <http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/ccbn/dewitt/consultframe.htm> . The site lists the delegates as well as posts transcriptions of important documents from gathering. For an online version of the "Journals of the Consultation" as they appear in *Gammel's Laws of Texas*, click here: <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph5872/m1/513/>.

government into two factions, one led by the governor and the other led by Lieutenant Governor James W. Robinson. Unfortunately for the Texans, each rival faction claimed legitimacy but neither was effective. In military matters, the delegates had allowed the volunteers in the field to serve under officers of their own choosing, a decision which denied General Sam Houston, who commanded the regular army, any control over these troops. The result was the existence of two virtually independent armies, one located at San Antonio and the other at Goliad, each loyal to a different civil faction: Smith the former and Robinson, the latter.⁴ As for the stated purpose of restoration of Mexico's Federal Constitution of 1824, internal pressure from the War Party, external pressure from financiers, and events unfolding in the field quickly had most Texans calling for independence. For students of Texas history, understanding the Consultation's actions and their ramifications is vital to understanding the Texas Revolution.

⁴ Richard Bruce Winders, *Sacrificed at the Alamo: Tragedy and Triumph in the Texas Revolution*. (Abilene, TX: State House Press, 2004), 68-81. Winders addresses the breakdown of the civil government and military establishment and their dire affect on the course of the revolution.